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DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY
AT HOME & ABROAD



CONTENTS

OCTOBER, MCMXXXVI

- DIRECTOR AND DRAMATIST : BY
EDWARD GORDON CRAIG
RECENT PLAYS : BY MARK SEGAL
THE FIRST - NIGHTER CLUB
MOVEMENT : BY W. BUSHILL-
MATTHEWS ENGLISH PLAYS
IN NEW YORK : BY PAUL SHINKMAN
ILLUSTRATIONS

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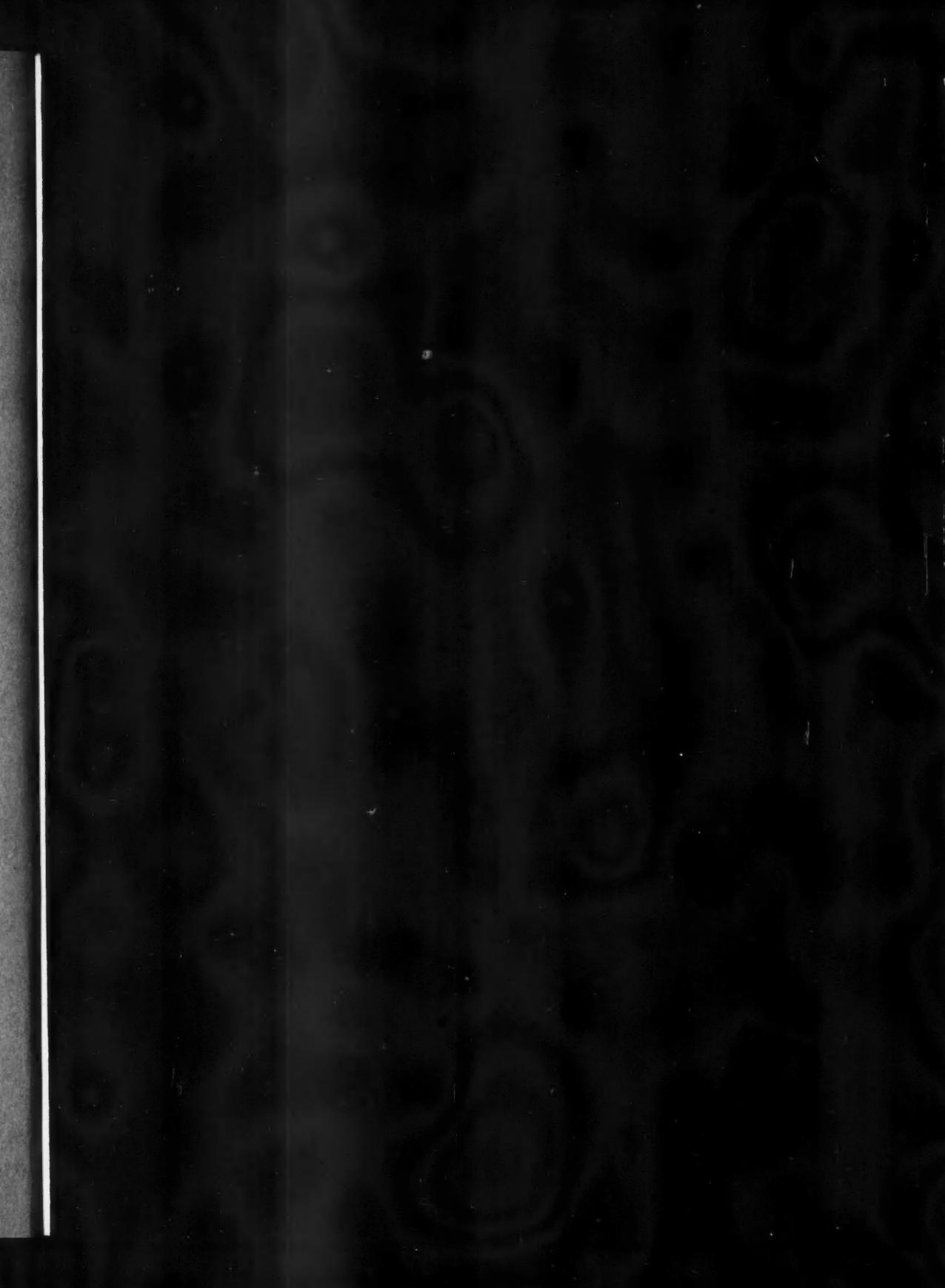
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D R A M A

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OCTOBER, MCMXXXVI

NUMBER 1

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

SUMMER PLAYS

By Mark Segal

THE ill winds of unseasonable weather and of Continental unease have diverted unexpected visitors into the London theatres, which have accordingly enjoyed their best summer for years, and even in spite of the weather, the Open Air Theatre, now a public institution supervised by a representative committee, has gained for itself a strong nucleus of staunch supporters.

Mr. Sydney Carroll, the courageous initiator of the enterprise, who continues to direct it, has pursued the well-tested policy of giving Shakespeare's plays; and among the successes have been the ever popular "Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Twelfth Night", the elaborately produced "Henry VIII," and, surprisingly, "Love's Labour's Lost." Another happy revival was Milton's "Comus." As in previous years, Mr. Robert Atkins has been the producer, and the company has numbered such veterans of the greensward as Mr. Leslie French, Mr. Baliol Holloway, Mr. Gyles Isham, Miss Phylis Neilson-Terry and Miss Margaretta Scott; while among the distinguished newcomers to Regent's Park were Miss Jean Forbes-Robertson, Mr. Lyn Harding, Miss Victoria Hopper, Miss Vivien Leigh and Miss Hilda Trevelyan.

Our other summer visitant, the Russian ballet, comes assured of arousing that rapturous enthusiasm which has enabled our native ballet to raise its head. Now, with M. René Blum's "Ballets de Monte Carlo" (directed by Fokine) at the Alhambra, with at the same time Col. de Basil's "Ballets Russes" (directed by Massine) at Covent Garden, the glory which departed with Diaghileff was seen to have returned; and to be drawing once more, as

witness Massine's "Symphonie Fantastique," fresh inspiration.

Otherwise, perhaps the most interesting event has been the emergence of the Hungarian dramatist, Lajos Zilahy, whose "Farewell Performance" (adapted by John L. Balderston) demolishes plausibility to make, at the Lyric, an actress's opportunity—which Miss Mary Ellis takes a little ponderously. Mr. Zilahy knows his theatre; but he gives evidence of something more, of feeling and quality, in two short consecutive scenes which were admirably rendered by Mr. O. B. Clarence and Mr. Douglas Stewart. Another small part was well played by Miss Mary Gaskell. Miss Irene Hentschel's production, excellent in other respects, stressed the humorous note too emphatically in places—her hotel porter would have been dismissed without notice for gross impertinence.

A less distinguished incursion into the improbable, of the kind classified as a "success story", is "Spring Tide," by George Billam and Peter Goldsmith, at the Duchess Theatre. Mr. H. K. Ayliff's production effectively exploits the humour and the sentimentality of the piece; in which Mr. Arthur Sinclair (possibly because of his race) is cast for an Irish kinsman of Lob, and Miss Louise Hampton is, as usual, clever and charming.

At Daly's "The Composite Man" soon departs from the plane of reality, to satirise a world in which artistic success is best gained by way of the lawn tennis field. No profundity is intended: Mr. Ronald Jeans has set out to amuse, and he succeeds handsomely; being aided by Mr. John Fernald's restrained

SUMMER PLAYS

production, in which only the music publisher is overdrawn.

A different kind of satire is in vogue at the Ambassador's Theatre, the home of Eleanor and Herbert Farjeon's "The Two Bouquets." There has been of late a tendency to hold up earlier generations to an easy and a rather vulgar ridicule. No such crudity is attempted here. This Victorian play of humour and sentiment is delicately flavoured with an occasional modern comment. A corresponding sophistication is to be remarked in Mr. Ernest Irving's witty musical arrangement and in Mr. Philip Gough's daringly stylised costumes; so that eye and ear are constantly charmed. The piece, which was produced by Mr. Maxwell Wray, owed a good deal to the liveliness of Mr. George Benson and of Miss Gertrude Musgrave.

The Victorians figured also, for a few nights only, in "The Ante-room" at the Queen's Theatre, a play derived from the book of that name by Miss Kate O'Brien. Another casualty, which deserved a better fate, was "Gentle Rain," by Denison Clift and Frank Gregory, at the Vaudeville. With all its faults of melodramatic plot and repetition of argument, this play was a serious and a dramatic discussion of the problem of euthanasia, and it was well received by the audience.

In contrast, Dudley Hoys' "Chinese White" has survived to be transplanted from Daly's to the Royalty Theatre. This is not melodrama at its best. On the other hand "The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse," by Barré Lyndon, at the Haymarket, is firmly and amusingly written, and its plot is not inherently impossible.

DIRECTOR AND DRAMATIST

By Edward Gordon Craig

OF M. Emile Fabre we hear so little that when we learn that he is Administrator of the Comédie Française, we are astonished . . . and still more so when we discover that he has been administrator for twenty-one years—probably the longest term for which the post has ever been occupied.

He is fitted for the position—possessing sympathy for all those men and women called together to work in harmony in the theatre . . . those men of ear, of eye, of touch, of taste, whose *métiers* always clash, and who quarrel so often because of this. These different aims and senses the Director (or Administrator, as he is called to-day) has to reconcile—so that the playwright is calmed, the actor roused, the *metteur-en-scène* encouraged, the debutant assisted, the supernumerary drilled, the chef d'orchestra sat on (I suppose), and the mechanical and other workmen paid a bit more as time goes on. And time does go on, without bending this upright and kindly *gentilhomme*.

Monsieur Emile Fabre is a dramatist, and while administering the affairs of the Comédie Française morning, noon and night, he also finds time to write books about the Theatre. His latest, with the simple title "*Le Théâtre*," has just appeared, and is both entertaining

and wise. It is a small volume of 203 pages, many of which have a fresh originality which one had supposed impossible, since one had also supposed that most things that could be said about the Theatre had already been said. Monsieur Fabre even tells a number of new anecdotes, one about Garrick and he speaks of a pantomimist, a pupil of Deburau, whom he has actually seen playing. His definitions are excellent: for example the exact meaning of the term *mise-en-scène*:

"Scenery, properties, costumes, lighting, crowd-movements—that is what the public, and even the critics, commonly mean by the word '*mise en scène*'." When looking through the numerous volumes which, during the last half-century, have been devoted to this art, one finds that they deal only with one or another of these subjects. Yet '*mise en scène*' contains many other elements, if we define it: *the ensemble of the measures that one takes in order to have a play well performed by actors whom one selects, with scenery that one invents*."

Monsieur Fabre says that I, "who demand so many qualities of the *metteur-en-scène*," have "only forgotten to demand the principal one from him." This principal quality he defines as:—

"A well-informed critical spirit which renders him capable of discerning the defects and the qualities of a work, of pointing out to the author where it drags, where it is obscure, where it is too improbable, where too abrupt, which scenes are superfluous, which ex-

DIRECTOR AND DRAMATIST

pressions dangerous—and even, if need be, of suggesting to him the necessary touching-up. "If in the old days," goes on Monsieur Fabre, "Montigny and Porel, and later on Antoine, Guitry, Gémier have been great régisseurs, if Piscator and Reinhardt are so to-day, it is because they have that kind of second-sight which enables them, merely by reading a manuscript, to divine what would be the reaction of the public to the play."

So Monsieur Fabre claims for the metteur-en-scène even more than I claimed for him; and I ask myself, "Why did I not claim as much?"

Not in my defence, but in my joy, I will once more repeat that I was never such an enemy of the dramatist that I could consider him incapable of knowing his own business. I would never "point out to the author where his play drags, where it is obscure," and so on. I think the Elizabethan manner was much better . . . where the framework of a play would be drawn up by a great or lesser writer, touched up by a second, improved by a third—the poet finally taking the work in hand and creating a pretty good play. I should sicken were I to feel that the whole affair of Drama and Theatre was so inadequately understood by the dramatist, that he never could come to know when to hurry, when to slow down, what scenes to leave out, what expressions to avoid, until the *metteur-en-scène* should tell him: and I think the Shakespearean method must be a better one than that of the authors whom Messrs. Antoine, Guitry, Gémier, Piscator and Reinhardt have, according to Monsieur Fabre, taken symbolically by the lapel of the coat and wagged a finger at, and told that they don't know their own business.

Of course this may be a good method with bad dramatists; but who wants to occupy his brief span of life wagging a finger at an inadequate playwriter, teaching him the business which, when all is said and done, cannot be taught? I do think the *metteur-en-scène* might have been allowed to take the early *framework* of any "King Lear" and cut it here and cut it there, writing down "move along here" in the margin and "too quick" there, or "too much pathos in last eight scenes," and so forth. But to write that down on the finished manuscript of a great play and have the awful misfortune of your note coming under the eye of a Shakespeare . . . what régisseur dare be quite such a little cockerel as that?

No . . . what I want to see is the return of a Shakespeare into the Theatre—the man himself—that he may teach us all that which we

do not know, which we should never be able to find out for ourselves, but which a Shakespeare could certainly teach us. Here, alas, I have Monsieur Fabre against me, with Messrs. Antoine, Guitry, Reinhardt and PISCATOR. Now I know Piscator a little, and I see the kind of unforgiving precision that I should have against me. Monsieur Fabre I do not fear so much, for I do not think that he would really have the audacity to tell a great dramatic poet where he thought that poet had made a mistake on the right side. Can you make a mistake on the right side? Yes—Shakespeare does. There have been people to say that Shakespeare made his "Hamlet" too long, so that it takes too many hours to perform: and I have heard one who said that "King Lear" was rather tedious. Now there are no two greater untruths than those two opinions: they are not merely wrong opinions—they are untrue, deeply, fundamentally untrue. Shakespeare's "mistake" is right—but our humanity, with its stupid notion of a short play so as to get off to supper, is wrong. And unless it is admitted to be wrong . . .

"Ah, but then don't bring it to my theatre," says the man—*i.e.* the suicide—who can organize theatres; for he runs the risk of losing "King Lear" and "Hamlet," both of which plays are capable of attracting immense audiences for lengthy periods, if played well and if produced as if they were written yesterday—all the cobwebs that have clung to them brushed off—all the varnish cleaned away, so that the colours shall be seen.

Monsieur Fabre, in his last words about the dramatist, makes some brief suggestions and "*règles du jeu*" for him; and he ends with this: "If these rules were absolute, a masterpiece could still be written while breaking all of them. This axiom does not hold good for authors who have but talent."

We are informed that since the above article was written, M. Emile Fabre has resigned from the Directorship of the Comédie Française.

AUTUMN RELEASES.

Since the publication of the July issue, Messrs. Samuel French have secured the amateur rights of a number of west-end successes. Among these, are, "Youth at the Helm," "Children to Bless You," "Charity Begins —," "Petticoat Fever," and "Springtime for Henry."

THE FIRST-NIGHTER CLUB MOVEMENT

By W. Bushill-Matthews

WHEN I first propounded the idea at our Autumn Conference at Stratford-upon-Avon last year, for establishing First-Nighter Clubs in the various provincial centres for the purpose of providing better audiences for the opening nights of each attraction at local play-houses, I purposely did not expatiate upon the detailed possibilities because I felt that it was best for each provincial centre to work in accordance with the local prevailing conditions. As readers who attended the Conference will know, the idea received a gratifying response, both from delegates, theatre correspondents, and the Press generally, and the Council of the League then invited me to organise the first Club of this kind in Birmingham, the provincial centre with which I am most closely associated, with the idea of other provincial centres following Birmingham's lead with the aid of the experience gained in that City.

The inaugural meeting which was held in the Alexandra Theatre, one of the newest and most comfortable provincial playhouses, was hailed as the most successful theatrical meeting ever held in the City. With Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth in the Chair, and the representatives of each of the four legitimate theatres, the local Council, the Theatrical Managers' Association, the Birmingham Amateur Dramatic Federation, all the theatrical interests, both professional and amateur, were completely represented, and Mr. John Drinkwater gave a very stimulating address. As a result of this meeting, 300 members were enrolled and the membership has steadily increased ever since. Since the establishment of the Club in Birmingham, Mr. John Drinkwater has consented to act as its first President.

The objects of the Club are shortly :—

1. To form an organised body of discriminating playgoers.
2. To encourage playgoers to attend the first nights at the legitimate Birmingham playhouses.
3. To stimulate interest in the theatre and to encourage the theatre-going habit.
4. To establish a right relationship between audience and stage.

5. To promote lectures, discussions and social functions for the furtherance of any of the above objects.

And members taking advantage of the special privilege bookings for the first Monday nights of local attractions have easily recouped themselves the annual subscription of 5s.

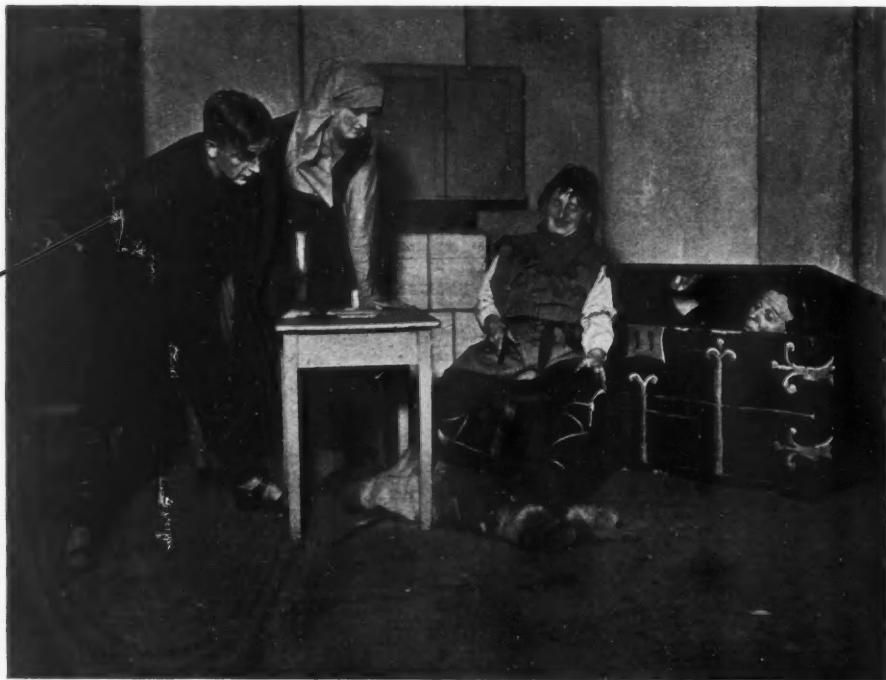
It will readily be seen that the scope of the Club is much wider than an attempt to fill the auditorium on Monday nights, for the Club can grow into an organised body of discriminating playgoers which can be regarded as a vital pulse of theatrical public opinion in the centre in which it flourishes. Furthermore by arranging lectures, meetings and social functions at times and places which can never be regarded as competitive with current theatrical entertainments, it can be used as a means of establishing the stage as a focal point of social interest.

It should not be necessary to emphasize the needs for cultivating the theatre-going habit, and during recent years this has been steadily declining in the provinces, and no clearer example of this can be given than at Birmingham where, for a period during the Summer months last year, its four legitimate theatres and two Music Halls were closed, which literally drove people desirous of dramatic entertainment into the nearby Cinemas, of which there are over a hundred. Again last Christmas three of the four legitimate theatres had pantomimes, two of which ran for approximately three months, the other one four months (the longest run in the country) and the other theatre was given over to a special Christmas production which ran for approximately two months. Thus it will be seen that during the Christmas Season which should be the peak of theatre-going, no playgoer could indulge in the theatre-going habit however keen he may be, unless he was prepared to see the same production over and over again.

Some years ago Mr. Philip Rodway, one of the most astute provincial theatre Managers, realising the loss felt by theatres throughout the year by the dropping of the theatre-going habit in Summer, inaugurated a twice-nightly



SCENE FROM "OEDIPUS REX" AS REVIVED
BY SIR JOHN MARTIN-HARVEY AT THE
ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, COVENT GARDEN,
28TH SEPTEMBER,—12TH OCTOBER, 1936.



REHEARSAL OF SCENE FROM "THE DEVIL
AMONG THE SKINS" BY ERNEST GOODWIN,
AS PERFORMED BY THE LIVERPOOL PLAY-
GOERS CLUB AT THE THALIA THEATRE,
HAMBURG, JULY, 29TH, 1936.

THE FIRST-NIGHTER CLUB MOVEMENT

Season at the Birmingham Theatre Royal, which succeeded in keeping the theatre open all the year round. A similar policy was also followed at the Prince of Wales Theatre of which he was also the Managing Director, or alternatively short resident Repertory Seasons of Shaw and Shakespeare were given in the belief that whether the Theatre made money or not during the Summer Season, it gained throughout the year by the benefit accruing by keeping alive the theatrical interest as a means of competing with other forms of entertainment which would continue to run if the theatres were closed. Since Mr. Philip Rodway's death the policy has not been successfully continued with the result that both of these theatres have been closed during the last few years for periods varying from one to two and a half months.

Now at the inception of the First-Nighter Club idea, I cannot claim that First-Nighter Clubs will immediately be successful in keeping the theatre open during the Summer Season, but I can claim by experience that theatre interest can be kept alive by organising theatrical garden parties and such similar social functions. This year, at a time when all Birmingham theatres save one were closed, a most successful theatrical garden party was held at the Botanical Gardens, Edgbaston, Birmingham, one Saturday afternoon, and by virtue of the big publicity campaign, both before and afterwards, much of the interest in the City's summer social life was focussed upon the theatre. This garden party was opened by the ever charming Miss Irene Vanbrugh and the proceeds given to theatrical charities. Of course, a feature of the Garden Party was the meeting of one's theatrical friends when the theatre was no longer a place at which one could meet, and also to see and be introduced to members of the theatrical profession, who are seldom seen away from the footlights. All the competitions were centred upon theatrical interests, and all the prizes were theatrical ones, each of the theatres giving boxes as prizes. In addition, a copy of "Philip Rodway and a Tale of Two Theatres" written by Miss Phyllis Philip Rodway, the first Secretary of the Club, and the joint author of the book with her sister, Mrs. Charles Slingsby was awarded to the winner of a Pantomime Titles Competition. A particularly attractive competition was the play title guessing from stage models of plays produced

during the last twenty-two years at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. To add to the infectious gaiety of this function there were sideshows including a balloon race which was won by the Lord Mayor, who attended with the Lady Mayoress.

It will be seen that during the Summer months interest in theatre-going has been kept alive in Birmingham, and now my attention is being focussed upon the next Christmas Season when, as last year, there will be three pantomimes, which the local Managers naturally hope will have long runs. During that period I can foresee opportunities for running playgoers' balls, soirées and tea time talks, and during the height of the Autumn and Spring Seasons, there will always be opportunities for inviting the distinguished members of visiting touring companies to meet and address members of the Club.

Local conditions always have to be considered but I believe there is great value in allowing members of the general public to obtain tickets for such functions as theatrical garden parties, playgoers balls and soirées, the actual members of the Club being given special privileges as to obtaining tickets, either in the way of booking or purchasing tickets at special privilege rates. Thus the scope of the Club can be an ever growing one, and new members enrolled. It is well known that at the present time the greatest theatrical vitality in the provinces is centred in the Repertory theatres of which there are two in Birmingham, the one run under the direction of Sir Barry Jackson, which makes a feature of producing new or classical plays for limited runs of two or three weeks, and the other at the Alexandra Theatre where Mr. Leon Salberg runs a Repertory Company which revives mostly West-End successes, with a sprinkling of Shaw, Barrie and Galsworthy upon twice-nightly lines, with a change of programme each Monday. These two Repertory Theatres were the first to realise the value of the First-Nighter Club movement and I foresee that other Repertory Theatres in other centres would also welcome the movement. It is equally well known that the touring system in the provinces has suffered a considerable decline during the last few years, and if the few Touring Managers concerned will realise the value of having a ready made audience on Monday nights, as so many of the Repertory Theatres have for the whole week, the theatres

THE FIRST-NIGHTER CLUB MOVEMENT

relying upon Touring productions and the First-Nighter Clubs could grow in strength side by side. Whilst patrons of Repertory Companies, being interested in the players themselves and having gained confidence in the management for selecting plays which the local public really wants, are prepared to visit the Company from week to week, without always waiting to hear what their friends have to say about it, or what the local press has to report, there seem to be few playgoers who are prepared to pay to see a production on a Monday night about which they know little, and therefore prefer to wait until they know what the other fellow thinks about it.

This attitude is an ever growing one and is, of course, fatal to players and managements concerned. The playing on the opening night is likely to lack vitality for want of stimulation by a sufficiently large audience, and the few people who are there are affected by the atmosphere of gloom which a sparsely filled auditorium always suffers, and consequently cannot be relied upon to spread the news very far as to the value of the particular play they have seen. Furthermore the audience at Monday nights are usually "paper" and comprise people who are there because they have had tickets given to them and have nothing better to do, and not because they are genuinely interested in the theatre for its own sake.

The benefit of the First-Nighter Club is two-fold because if the Touring Managements will grant members certain privilege bookings, the audience for the first night should be consequently greater. The production will gain in vitality by contact with a larger and better audience, and then each member of the Club attending on the Monday night can be regarded as a walking advertisement for the rest of the week, and can be relied upon to tell his or her friends that the show for the current week is one to be seen.

It may be said that members of the First-Nighter Club are the people who are likely to go to the theatre in any event, and with the encouragement to attend on the Monday nights there will be a lessening of the audience for the rest of the week, and that if they are able to purchase a seat at a slightly reduced rate, there will be a consequent loss at the box office, but as I have already shown, far-seeing managements should readily realise that the presence of the really discriminating playgoers at the opening night would mean

that they can be relied upon to be responsible for increasing the audiences the rest of the week. Further the habit having grown up in the provinces of always waiting until after the first night is over, many people never think of going to the theatre before Wednesday, and if the production is a popular one, it may not be possible to accommodate all the people who want to see the Show at the end of the week; now if you withdraw the members of the First-Nighter Club from attendance at the end of the week and assure their presence on the Monday night when there is ample room for all, the seats which would normally be taken up by them will be available for the general public, and thus there is a consequent gain all round.

The work of organising new ventures is always an interesting one, and I hope to see under the auspices of the League several First-Nighter Clubs inaugurated during the next twelve months.

Let members of the League at such places as Plymouth, Bristol, Cardiff, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Leeds, Nottingham, Leicester, Glasgow and Edinburgh see that such a Club is started, for the aims of the League can no better be fostered than in the establishment of such Clubs!

EVENING PRACTICE CLASSES AT THE DRAMA LEAGUE.

This Autumn, in response to numerous requests, a series of six classes will be held at the British Drama League on Wednesday evenings, beginning on November 11th and ending on December, 16th. The object of these classes is to provide opportunity for practice in certain aspects of production and acting, and also in property-making and make-up. We have received many requests for fuller instruction in make-up, but it has not been possible to devote sufficient time to this subject in the programme of an ordinary Drama school. Therefore it is hoped that a course of six lessons from an expert would be of great assistance to those who wish to increase their knowledge of the subject. The classes will be small, so that each member will receive individual attention.

Intending students may enter for one of the courses only, or for two courses, but the make-up course will coincide with the production course, and the property-making with the acting course. It would therefore be possible to enter for both production and acting; or for both make-up and acting, or for production and property-making.

Full details of the classes will be announced in the November "Drama," or may be had on application to the Schools Organiser.

The British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild announces its eleventh Annual Exhibition at Victory House, Leicester Place, Leicester Square, from October 19th—24th.

ENGLISH PLAYS IN NEW YORK

By Paul A. Shinkman

ENGLAND once more stands proudly at the head of the list of nations which faithfully contribute each year to the maintenance of the precious international traditions of the American theatre. A survey of the recently completed 1935-36 season on Broadway reveals that of all the plays brought to New York from abroad, no fewer than two-thirds had their origins in London.

Perhaps an even more compelling proof of the extraordinary influence exercised by the London theatre upon that of New York is to be found in the report that of all the new plays presented in the latter city during the past season, more than ten per cent were imported from England. So much for the part our English cousins are playing in the current theatrical history of America.

The 89 new plays presented to New York audiences during the past twelvemonth included the following distinguished list from London, each with the number of performances given: "Victoria Regina" 181 (to resume with the opening of the 1936-37 season); "Libel!" 156; "Call it a Day," 155 (and continuing into the summer or between-season period); "Love on the Dole" 112 (also continuing into the summer); "Lady Precious Stream" 104; "Fresh Fields" 80; "Sweet Aloes" 24; "Eden End" 24; "Night in the House" 12; and "Mainly for Lovers" 8.

It should be noted here that, although the very successful "Victoria Regina" was written and acted by Americans, it did reach its eminent position on the New York stage via London, where it had been offered previously. Another outstanding success of the season, "Pride and Prejudice," was likewise an all-American offering, but owes a vast debt of gratitude to England's Jane Austen.

The above statistics apply, of course, only to new plays offered in the commercial theatre. But it would be unfair in any such survey as this to overlook the 115 performances of Gilbert and Sullivan operas given during the year, to say nothing of the enormously successful presentation of T. S. Eliot's play, "Murder in the Cathedral," by the government's Federal Theatre Project. Indeed, the enthusiastic response of the critics and the public to the Eliot play at the very beginning of

the government's highly dubious venture into "show business," undoubtedly has done more than anything else to clothe the whole Federal Theatre Project with dignity and undeniable prestige.

Still other revivals of the past season for which New York must thank London were Mr. Shaw's "Saint Joan," and Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew," "Romeo and Juliet," "Othello," and "Macbeth." Miss Katharine Cornell, considered by many to be America's No. 1 Actress, presented such a distinguished picture of the Maid of Orleans as conceived by Shaw, that she will be compelled to present it again in a tour of the provinces during the coming season. Likewise, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne were so well received in their revival of "The Taming of the Shrew" that they added it to their own repertory for the provinces. Gladys Cooper and Philip Merivale were somewhat less successful in their ventures with "Othello" and "Macbeth," but found themselves later in the season more happily suited with Dodie Smith's comedy, "Call It a Day."

Miss Cooper was undoubtedly the most celebrated of the British visitors to the American stage during the 1935-36 season, but there was a score of other talented performances by her countrymen, including Wendy Hillier, Colin Keith-Johnston, Bramwell Fletcher, Colin Clive, and Evelyn Laye.

THE LITTLE THEATRE ACADEMY

We have received an announcement of the opening of the "Little Theatre" Academy, 23, Soho Square, W.1., of which the second term commenced on September 18th. The object of the Academy is to raise the standard of amateurs so that their art will have a greater drawing power with the public.

The courses are arranged specially to appeal to amateurs. Students may enter for a preliminary course of twelve lessons, thus giving the opportunity of ascertaining without great expense whether they have special gifts or not.

The Academy is also to be responsible for a production of religious drama in a well-known church in Central London. Full particulars may be obtained from the Secretary at the above address.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF

THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE INCORPORATING THE VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY

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Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

THE Annual Conference of the British Drama League, to be held this year at Liverpool, is certainly the most important event which faces members of the British Drama League in the near future. The programme of the Conference is being sent to members of the League together with this copy of the magazine, and we hope that an even larger number of members than usual will join in this important meeting. Owing to its new constitution, the fortunes of the Drama League are more closely the concern of each individual member and affiliated Society than in the past. Often the Annual Conference has initiated policies of high importance, and will doubtless do so again. Even if this were not so, the Conference affords a unique opportunity for establishing the principles on which we work, and for promoting an understanding

of problems which affect not only the League itself but the Theatre as a whole. This year we are particularly grateful to the Directors of the Liverpool Playhouse for their generosity in inviting the entire Conference to view the performance of "The Composite Man" on the evening of the opening day, Friday, October 23rd.

Some of the County Committees which were formed early in the year are already at work. Others are marking time until the Council of the League is in a position to inform them as to the financial help which may be expected for the initial expenses of administration. Let it not be thought that time has been lost in giving serious consideration to this problem. Two Sub-Committees have already met, and it may be that at the time of the Conference it will be possible to give some indication as to the method of assistance which will be adopted. It is obvious that the League would be wrong to expect work to be undertaken on its behalf without some measure of financial aid. At the same time the funds of the League are not unlimited, and as it was in the case of the League itself, it will probably be found that beginnings must be made on a moderate scale. Not only is this sound finance, but also some insurance against the promotion of schemes which may ultimately be found impracticable.

The holiday months were notable for the number of Festivals, Schools and Conferences which took place not only in this country but abroad. One of our illustrations this month shows a rehearsal of the Liverpool Playgoers' Club for their performance at Hamburg in connection with the World Congress of Leisure which assembled in that city in the first week of August. Subsequently the players, who were the guests of the Congress, made a tour through several towns in Upper Silesia. Everywhere they met with an enthusiastic reception, and most worthily upheld the credit of Great Britain in the company of artistic representatives from the principal countries in Europe, to say nothing of those from lands so widely separate as China and the Irish Free State.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by F. Sladen-Smith

"The Birth of Ballets-Russe" By Prince Peter Lieven. Allan and Unwin. 15s.

"Apology for Ballet." By Rayner Heppenstall. Faber and Faber. 12s. 6d.

"The Balletomane's Scrap-Book." By Arnold L. Haskell. A. and C. Black. 7s. 6d.

"Stage Management." By Peter Bax. Lovat Dickson. 5s.

"The Onlie Begetter." By Ulric Nisbet. Longmans, Green and Co. 6s.

"The Problem of Hamlet." By A. S. Cairncross. Macmillan. 7s. 6d.

"Goethe's Faust" (Part 1). New acting version by Graham and Tristan Rawson. John Lane. 2s. 6d.

"At 'The Fountain'" By Ernest Setley. Williams and Norgate. 3s. 6d.

"The Pageant Rehearsal." By Horace Sequeira. Stanley Nott. 3s. 6d.

"Mimes." By M. Gertrude Pickersgill. London School of Dramatic Art. 2s. 6d.

THE remarkable re-awakened interest in ballet is well shown in this month's list. Prince Peter Lieven's book "The Birth of Ballets-Russe" should give all thoughtful students both of life and of the ballet pleasure. Beginning with the discussions of a tiny debating society in the St. Petersburg of 1880, the author traces the growth of the most exotic manifestation of pre-war culture, the Diaghileff ballet—presenting a vivid picture of the little group of artists, so like the average group in their quarrels and enthusiasms, so unlike them in the fiery genius which at first seemed a common possession. Diaghileff, Bakst, Fokine, Nijinsky, Karsavina, Pavlova, all are here, and nothing is better in the book than the way the author compares the inspiring early days with the hopeless striving after novelty which characterized the weary, disillusioned Diaghileff of the post-war period. There is some slip shod writing at times, but the revealing detail and the wise and kindly view of life which permeates the volume, together with some excellent illustrations, make this new record a delightful one. Better written, well illustrated, but very different is "Apology for the Ballet" by Mr. Rayner Heppenstall. The cover warns us to expect provocations, but the polemics tend to be tiresome rather than provocative, while the reference to Isadora Duncan are more reasonable than we are led to expect. In common with most essays on ballet there is a good deal of contorted phrasing, but the book is illuminated by commonsense and humour—not quite enough of the latter. The frank championship of the English ballet, the dislike of "originality," of the "activity of an artist" as opposed to the creation of art, are refreshing features; and the reader will finish the volume, a little weary, perhaps, but with a better disposition towards ballet than is induced by the usual rhapsodies. A fitting conclusion is Mr. Arnold L. Haskell's "Balletomane's Scrap-Book." It shows in a striking manner both the continuity of the ballet under Col de Basil, and also the subtle, but profound, differences which separate it from the early Diaghileffian triumphs. No. balletomane (an ugly word if ever there was one) can afford to be

without these 193 amusing, stimulating and, in many cases, unique photographs.

"Stage Management" by Mr. Peter Bax, is the best book on this important subject which has appeared up to now. Indeed, up to now, there has been no really authoritative volume to which the harassed stage manager could turn in moments of crisis. The author began his work with the Unnamed Society of Manchester, but speedily found his footing in the professional world; and his attainments are interesting if only as a proof that, despite the times, it is possible to make a success of the drastic step of throwing up the career for which one has been trained in favour of the stage. The book is remarkably comprehensive, and, quite apart from the technical instruction, the strange atmosphere of the stage-worker's shadowy world adds to its fascination. Good stage management is vital to the success of any play—aspiring stage managers, please consult Mr. Bax on the subject.

To many people Mr. Ulric Nisbet's "The Onlie Begetter"—a new theory of the identity of Shakespeare's "Mr. W. H."—will be as confusing as it is brief. Starting his researches in New York and ending them in an old church near London, the author endeavours to prove that the mysterious inspirer of most of the Sonnets was William Harbert, later Sir William Herbert, K.B., Baron Powys of Powys in the County of Montgomery. We have not space to deal with Mr. Nisbet's deductions, which resemble most Shakespearian speculation with their strained interpretations and snatching at odd lines, especially as at the end, despite much detail, William Harbert remains little more than a name. Rather more interesting and convincing is Mr. A. S. Cairncross' "The Problem of Hamlet," which offers a complete revolution in Shakespearian chronology. If it can be proved that "Hamlet" was written late in 1588, then many theories go by the board. Mr. Cairncross' own theories are no stronger than those which have gone before and, in the matter of parallels, it will soon be sufficient for the word "thanks" to appear in two plays for a deep, basic connection to be conjectured, but some points would seem to be established; it is comforting to find that "The Tempest" is still allowed to be "probably" the last play.

Mr. Graham and Mr. Tristan Rawson's version of "Faust, Part I" (originally produced at the Old Vic) is especially interesting as it is written for the theatre, not for the study. It has proved a difficult problem to translate "Faust" with distinction—few masterpieces lose so much in translation—but, despite a lack of poetic splendour, from the point of view of the stage this is much the best version which has appeared up to now. A production would add to the laurels of any theatre, professional or amateur.

"At 'The Fountain' and other plays" by Mr. Ernest Setley, is a collection of three one-act plays, none of which is particularly striking, although the invidious position of the public hangman as shown in "Service Above Self" has dramatic possibilities. With regard to the last, "The Heirloom," we can only express surprise at the reappearance, with little alteration, of a theme which has already been used by at least two

RECENT BOOKS

well-known dramatists. Some of Mr. Horace Sequeira's monologues and duologues for women have been assembled together and published under the title of "The Pageant Rehearsal." A great deal depends on the way this kind of thing is done—meanwhile, only one of the short pieces requires an acting fee, and only one (and that the first) struck us as being particularly funny.

"Mimes," by Miss M. Gertrude Pickersgill, is a

charmingly produced little book, not, as the authoress points out, intended for beginners in the difficult art of silent expression, but for those who have had definite experience. They will find the nine mimes (four of which are to the spoken word, five to music) fascinating problems to study, although it should have been made clear if the dialogue in "Aladdin" is intended to be spoken or no. The illustrations suggest suitable costumes for the mimes when performed.

A VILLAGE EXPERIMENT

By Alison Graham-Campbell

WHAT'S this 'ere *maternity* play? an old Yorkshireman asked when he heard that the village drama group was preparing its first Christmas production! It was an unambitious effort, a half-hour of mimed carols given with Bible readings at the end of the weekly drama lecture. The general public was not admitted and the few friends who had been invited to join the non-acting members in the audience were asked to consider themselves as students rather than as mere spectators. Despite this unpretentiousness or perhaps because of it, "this 'ere maternity play" proved to be a definite artistic achievement. The movement was, for beginners, really excellent—both expressive and well sustained—and the sincerity and simplicity of the actors created so strong an atmosphere that the audience was completely carried away. More often than not a raw village audience shows its self-consciousness by giggling, but in this case the play was received with complete reverence.

But the production had not been undertaken in the first place either as an act of worship or as a work of art. It had been decided upon as a form of class exercises which could be closely and easily related to the theoretical work in the drama lectures. The method of working was as follows:—

Every week the lecture was followed by practical work illustrating the points which had been raised. After an evening's discussion of grouping, for example, different students undertook each to produce one of the mimed carols, and we saw some interesting examples both of the artistic and of the dramatic value of grouping. One felt that the students had not only grasped the more obvious points such as balance, variety and

the avoidance of masking, but had begun to acquire a real appreciation of the value of dramatic emphasis and the shifting of the focal point.

In the same way, the miming of the different carols gave excellent opportunities for illustrating a lecture on movement. Before the parts were cast the group worked as a class, all together going through the emotional movements of each scene and all (angels, kings and shepherds alike) putting in much hard work on character movement so as to conquer their own rustic clumsiness.

Speech, too, had its place in the course, and the students were introduced to the fundamentals of breathing, voice production and the control of pace, pitch and volume. But in this case no attempt was made to introduce the group's speech work into the production. It would have been possible. Voice production could have been illustrated by making the whole class (instead of the Reader alone) work at the Bible passages which came between the scenes. But there was not time for everything. Is it too much, though, to hope that the close relationship between the acting and the singing (with its rallentandos, its diminendos and crescendos) will have begun to develop that sensitiveness to changes of speech tempo which is so often completely lacking in the beginner?

Another section of the syllabus dealt with the interpretation of plays by means of stage presentation. Difficulties of expense prevented any attempt to illustrate style in our own production. Period costumes would have been needed to harmonize with the atmosphere of the mediæval carols, the simple ritualistic acting, and the almost liturgical readings between the scenes. Instead the

A VILLAGE EXPERIMENT

actors had to content themselves with realism. Makeshift biblical costumes are easy to evolve, and suitable striped blankets, table-cloths and towels, silk and woollen dressing-gowns, etc., were pressed into service as foundation garments, cloaks and head-dresses. There might be compromise over style—it was inevitable—but there could be none in the matter of consistency. If the shepherds were to be the shepherds of Palestine, then the Kings must be real Eastern potentates with long robes and turbans or flowing veils. The angels, moreover, could have none of the highly-coloured decorative quality of the haloed priestlike seraphs of religious art; instead, they were the greek-robed, showy-feathered beings who (for some reason or another) inhabit the Palestine of the average Sunday School illustration.

One evening was spent in studying and contriving the necessary properties for the play. Shepherds' crooks and lanterns were borrowed—there could be no lack of these in a village buried in the Yorkshire wolds—but for the gold, frankincense and myrrh suitable caskets had to be made. Sandals, too, were copied from illustrations of the Holy Land—this provided work for a big group of students—while another large contingent undertook the pasting of tier upon tier of crepe-paper feathers on to the buckram foundation of the angels' wings. Again, other individual students made themselves responsible for the shepherds' fire, St. Joseph's crepe-hair beard, the Virgin's paper madonna lilies, the first King's cardboard crown, the wooden crib, and a most impressive five-pointed electric star which threw a beam of light the whole way down the hall.

The setting itself was simple. Two of the group had erected a curtain in front of a low platform of trestle tables which rested on forms. That was all. Yet even on this bare makeshift stage it was possible for the students to try out for themselves the theories they had formed with regard to the use of different levels for dramatic domination, isolation of characters, etc. One producer made simple, but effective use of a low step leading up to the centre of the stage. This allowed the Wise Men to make their entrance from the auditorium and to play part of their scene (the "We Three Kings" carol) in front of the curtains.

The lighting equipment was as primitive as

the staging. It consisted of one red bulb for the fire and three small floods, those of each side of the stage provided with blue gelatines and the central one on a flex long enough for it to be placed either inside the crib or on the floor for lighting the angels. Even with this meagre equipment it was possible to demonstrate the value and importance of lighting. The creation of atmosphere could be illustrated—a glory of white light flooded the annunciation scene, while a subdued blue was used for the stable, the fields and the street outside the inn. Wherever possible flat lighting was avoided and the red glow of the fire, the yellow gleam of a lantern or the white radiance of the manger served for dramatic emphasis and to give plasticity to the various scenes.

Curiosity, a genuine, if cautious, interest, and a total ignorance of the theatre are all things which the drama tutor has to expect who tackles an introductory course in a village. With so little background to work upon it is hard to know where to begin. No good work can be done on any production until the actors are completely soaked in their play; plot, character and atmosphere all must live in their minds. At the same time the absolute beginner will not wait week after week to study a play—the villager reads slowly, one must not forget. But if he can be set to work at once on a play which already lives for him, which means a lot to him and to the audience to whom he is interpreting it, a great part of this difficulty will be solved. People may bewail the passing of rural culture, but the Bible at least is still familiar to our villagers and there is much to be said for seizing upon this as a foundation stone and building upon it the serious dramatic work of the village group.

"MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL."

A welcome London theatrical revival is that of T. S. Eliot's poetic play, "Murder in the Cathedral," which is now in its second run at the Mercury Theatre, Notting Hill Gate. Mr. Robert Speaight again heads the cast as Becket, and his moving and sensitive interpretation of the Archbishop is a performance that will long remain in the memory. For Mr. E. Martin Browne's production, too, there can be nothing but praise; and amateur producers would be well advised to visit the Mercury if only to see a perfect example of professional presentation on a small stage. "Murder in the Cathedral" will reach its 200th performance on October 3rd.

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE LEAGUE

The Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the British Drama League was held on Friday, June 26th, 1936, at 9, Fitzroy Square.

The Director reported that Lord Howard de Walden could not be present at the meeting.

Major Long-Innes proposed, Mr. Alec L. Rea seconded, and it was

RESOLVED :—"That Mr. Kenneth R. Barnes should take the Chair."

The Director stated that an alteration in the Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting had been made to the effect that the proposal stated to have been made by the Chairman as to the appointment of a Sub-Committee to draft the new constitution had actually been made by Mr. J. P. Quinton. This alteration was initiated by Mr. Barnes.

Mr. Sharman proposed, Mr. Hubert Wood seconded and it was

RESOLVED :—"That the Minutes of the two special general meetings subsequent to the last Annual General Meeting should be taken as read, and signed."

Annual Report :

Before dealing with the Report, Mr. Whitworth expressed his appreciation of the work of the Sub-Committee which had drafted the new Constitution of the Council. The new rules had been put into force and meetings had been held in nearly every county and representatives had been duly elected. The newly elected Council would be meeting for the first time in its enlarged form later in the afternoon.

Passing to the Report, he outlined the main activities which had been recorded.

As regards the National Theatre. Despite a certain amount of propaganda there was no actual progress to report. A reorganisation of the terms of the Trust was contemplated, and until the legal formalities had been completed it was not proposed to take definite action.

The Exhibition of Modern Scenic Design at Messrs. Derry and Toms had been a great success, over two thousand people having attended. It had now been transferred *en bloc* to the City Art Gallery, Manchester.

Turning to Foreign Drama, Mr. Whitworth said that international relations in this sphere seemed more friendly than in the political world. Mr. Norman Marshall was leading the British Drama League party to Russia this Summer, and an increasing number of visitors had come to 9, Fitzroy Square from overseas.

The Dialect Records were on sale, and the thanks of the League were due to Mr. Alec Rea for his generosity in heading the list of subscribers towards the sum needed, i.e., £60, for the presentation of a permanent set of records to the British Museum. £30 remained to complete the purchase.

The Drama Schools had continued their success of previous years, to which Miss Mackenzie's excellent work had largely contributed.

The Village Drama Committee had organised two new County Committees, and Miss Kelly had been appointed Director of Drama at Exeter, which was a valuable asset to the League and to Drama in that part of the world.

The Junior Drama Committee, among other activities, had organised a Junior Festival at which the

West Central Boys' Club had given an outstanding performance of excerpts from "Henry VI," Part II.

Mr. Whitworth said that had Dr. Boas been present he would have spoken of the work of the Library and of the increased utility of that department. He mentioned the gifts of books made during the year, and spoke of his appreciation of the services of Miss Coates and Miss Garnham.

The Festival had again shown an increase in entries.

In conclusion, Mr. Whitworth paid a warm tribute to the work of Miss Briggs and of the entire staff for their hard work and loyal support during a period of unusual difficulty owing to the move and the increase in work in connection with the organisation of County Meetings, etc.

It was finally proposed by the Chairman and

RESOLVED :—"That the Report should be adopted."

Balance Sheet :

In moving the adoption of the Balance Sheet, Mr. Rea said that the accounts were being audited by a new method which took a good deal more time. He regretted, therefore, that it had been impossible to have the Balance Sheet printed before this meeting. A copy would, however, be sent to every member during the autumn. Mr. Rea was able to report that the financial situation was fairly satisfactory. Some departments were doing extremely well. If full support were given to the Costume Department by the members, he was sure that this also would be a paying concern. Mr. Rea concluded by stating that if any member desired more information as to the Accounts he would be glad to give it after the meeting.

The adoption of the Accounts was then proposed by Mr. Rea, seconded by Mr. Clifford Bax, and passed unanimously.

Report of Election of Council :

The Director reported that the following Councillors had been elected or co-opted:—Trustees : Lord Howard de Walden, Lord Esher, Mr. Alec L. Rea, Mr. Kenneth Barnes. National Members : Mr. Clifford Bax, Dr. F. S. Boas, Mrs. Nesfield Cookson, Mr. Ashley Dukes, Miss Elsie Fogerty, Miss Mary Kelly, Mr. C. Harold Ridge, Miss Janet Scrutton, Professor T. H. Seears, Mr. B. L. Sutcliffe, Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth, Mr. T. S. Eliot, Mr. Ivor Brown, Mr. Norman Marshall, Mr. B. J. Benson. Regional Members : Mr. R. Douglas Robertson, elected by Scotland, Mr. D. Glen MacKemmie, elected by the Scottish Community Drama Association. Mr. John Hirst, Mrs. Gertrude Usher, Mr. Herbert J. Scott and Mr. Hubert Wood, elected by Northern Area Committee. Mr. W. Bushill Matthews, Mr. Laurence Housman, Mr. E. S. Darmady and Mrs. V. C. Seeley, elected by Western Area Committee. Mr. S. N. Whitehead, Miss Florence Smith, Mrs. Gordon Whitmore and Mr. Victor Thornton, elected by Eastern Area Committee. Mr. D. Haydn Davies, elected by Welsh Committee. Lady Iris Capell and Mr. E. Stuart Monro, elected by London. Co-opted Members : Mr. Lewis Casson, Miss Edith Craig, Mr. John Hampden and Mr. George O. Sharrman. Mr. Walter Payne, representing the Society of West-End Theatre Managers. The Hon. Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton,



SCENE FROM "A ROMANCE OF CHALVEDUNE," BY MRS. THOMAS. PRODUCED BY MISS Y. DESPREZ AND THE REV. R. WILLIAMS, IN THE CHALK PIT, CHALDON, SURREY.

(This is a revival of the performance given in 1920, one of the first productions given by a Society affiliated to the Drama League).



SCENE FROM "END AND BEGINNING," BY
JOHN MASEFIELD, PRODUCED BY MARJORIE
SOUTHWELL-SANDER, AT THE LITTLE
THEATRE, CAPE TOWN.

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE LEAGUE

representing the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre. A representative of the Theatrical Managers' Association. A representative of the British Actors' Equity.

Mr. Emmet raised the question of the definition of London. He reported that the Middlesex members did not have an opportunity of meeting though at the last moment an election for a county representative had been held. Further, parts of Middlesex had been included with London, and he considered the position should be regularised.

Mr. Whitworth replied that Middlesex and London had heretofore been filed together on the League's Register, but he would see that the matter was put in order before next year.

Election of Auditors :

Miss Fogerty proposed, Professor Sears seconded, and it was
RESOLVED :—“That Messrs. Blakemore, Elgar & Company should be re-elected for the coming year.”

A vote of thanks was passed to the Auditors for their work during the past year.

Proposed by Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth :

“That rule VII (b) ‘The Council shall meet three times in each year . . .’ should read ‘The Council shall meet at least twice in each year . . .’”

Mr. Whitworth said that now that the Council was so large there were obvious reasons why one would wish to limit its meetings to such occasions as were necessary. He thought that during the next year or two the Council

would wish to devolve various sides of its duties to sub-Committees, and it might be found in future years that two meetings per annum were adequate.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Rea and carried unanimously.

Other Business :

Mr. A. J. Talbot asked if anything was being done about the old Council. He had been a member since Covent Garden days, and he hoped that the new Council would keep up the record of progress achieved by the old. He knew that much of this was due to Mr. Whitworth who was still in office, but he thought the old council deserved some thanks for their achievement.

Mr. Wood seconded this proposal.

Mr. T. R. Dawes said he thought he had the melancholy privilege of being the oldest member of the League, and he would like to say that so long as Mr. Whitworth was there nothing else very much mattered — his object in speaking however was to support the vote of thanks to the old Council.

The motion on being put to the vote was carried.

Mrs. Salaman then said she would like to express good will to the new Council — this was seconded by Miss Pakington.

An expression of goodwill for the future work of the League was voted by all concerned.

The meeting closed with a vote of thanks to the Chairman, proposed by Mr. Rea, and passed unanimously.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

EIGHTH MALVERN FESTIVAL.

To attend a Malvern Festival which is run under the direction of Sir Barry Jackson in association with Roy Limbert at the Malvern Theatre is to enjoy theatre going in excelsis. To appreciate the Festival to the full, of course, one wants to stay for the whole week and to enjoy all the ancillary attractions. Serial ticket holders for the six consecutive performances of each week first of all meet each other and members of the Festival Company at a Garden Party in the grounds of the County Hotel, and thus starts the proper and right relationship between the stage and the audience, which the League is ever so anxious to cultivate. During the mornings there are lectures in the conference room of the Abbey Hotel, which were delivered this year by Professor F. S. Boas, Principal A. E. Morgan, Professor Ifor Evans and Sir Barry Jackson, and on two afternoons of each week there are tea time talks in the Winter Gardens adjoining the Theatre. Doubtless one of the most attractive features of the Festival is the Malvern Festival Club which is run for theatre ticket holders in the Winter Gardens after each evening performance. It is possible to pass into the Winter Gardens under cover from the Theatre, and in the attractively decorated ballroom one may dance, partake of light refreshments, discuss the play with one's friends, neighbours, or members of the Festival Company themselves, and then take a quiet stroll through the illuminated Priory Park adjoining with its flood-lit swimming pool reserved, after 9 p.m., for members of the Festival Club.

I was so pleased to meet so many members of the League during the first week of the Festival, and can forecast that the number of League supporters to the Festival will grow considerably from year to year, for I know of nowhere in the provinces where dramatic performances are being given in such accordance with the general aims and objects of the League.

After the Eighth Festival which ended on the 22nd August, visitors immediately began to book up for next year, not knowing what plays were to be offered, which signifies the way in which the true Festival spirit can completely captivate ones heart, and how people who have first met at the Festival regard it, like our League Conferences, as an occasion for annual reunion.

This year much of the interest centred upon Shaw's “St. Joan” and Wendy Hiller's appearance in the title part and also this same actress's appearance in the widely contrasted rôle of Eliza in Shaw's “Pygmalion.” These plays were not, of course, single star productions, the team work under the direction of Herbert Prentice being an outstanding feature of these two plays, as in the whole programme. Helen Jerome's adaption of Charlotte Bronte's “Jane Eyre” with Reginald Tate as Rochester, and Curigwen Lewis as Jane proved particularly popular, and London playgoers may look forward to the early production of this play with scenery and costumes designed by Paul Shelving. Again there was the production during the first week of S. I. Hsiung's “Lady Precious Stream,” and a particularly fine production of Shaw's “On the Rocks” with an outstanding performance by the young

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

Birmingham Repertory actor, Stephen Murray as the Prime Minister.

It will be noticed that all these plays are by living authors but to complete the programme a delightful excursion was taken in to the Eighteenth Century with the presentation of David Garrick's and George Colman's "Clandestine Marriage," a sparkling and brightly coloured production, with scenery designed by Jean Campbell and costumes designed by Paul Shelving. Much robust comedy was introduced by Isobel Thornton as Mrs. Heidelberg and Ernest Thesiger as Lord Ogleby, with Charles Victor, Alan Robinson and Derek Prentice giving some well-contrasted and charming studies as the three Counsellors.

W. BUSHILL-MATTHEWS.

CAPE TOWN'S LITTLE THEATRE.

It has been the writer's recent good fortune and privilege to have been associated for the best part of three years with the Little Theatre in S. Africa under the inspiring Directorship of Professor Bell, late Dean of the Faculty of Music in the University of Cape Town to which the Theatre belongs.

In consequence the policy from the first—(the "Sea Gull" was produced in 1932)—has been largely experimental and frequently original as in the case of the charming operas, "Hatsuyuki" and "The Pillow of Kanton" which were settings of Japanese No plays, the Ballet, particularly "Fête Champêtre" in its Watteau frame and costumes, a Ben Jonson Masque, and incidental music to Maeterlinck's "Sister Beatrice," all of which were composed by W. H. Bell, F.R.A.M.

The prose translation of the Medea by Benjamin Farrington, at the time of the first performance Professor in Classics at the University, aroused great interest no less for its virile and colloquial dialogue as for the extreme beauty of an austere set, and lighting effects in which the great size of the cyclorama was used to full advantage.

"Honest Men," a costume play by Horowitz, a promising young S. African writer gave opportunity to genuine local talent, and among first performances seen at the Cape, if not in Africa, have been "Figaro," "The Apple Cart," Pirandello's "Henry IV," Sierra's "Cradle Song," and "Kingdom of God," "Marriage à la Mode" by Dryden, Masefield's verse-play of the last hours of Mary Stuart—"End and Beginning"—Gluck's opera "Orpheus" and a play—Sladen-Smith's "Spring on Wyn Hill,"—in which clever masks were made by the Lecturer in Anthropology who is in addition an adept in the construction of Greek Armour and stage props.

Since 1934 the entire reconstruction of the Theatre (previously a converted Chemistry block in the University's old buildings) has provided an auditorium to seat close on 400, notable for its graceful design and excellent acoustics, a deep stage with orchestra well, and such a completely equipped switch-board and lighting apparatus that it has kept the 3 or 4 men in control perspiring freely throughout the performances of such a production as Galsworthy's "The Roof."

Settings, often devised single-handed by a Director who seemed never so happy as when in shirt-sleeves with a hammer in his hand, have proved as effective in their simple design as for their solid and accurate construction, whether it were Arch, plinth or pylon.

Only one English Touring Company has visited Cape Town in the last 3 years and S. Africans rely

almost entirely for any serious contribution to the Drama on such productions as have been put on by those connected with the South African College of Music, the Capt Town Repertory Company, the University Dramatic Society and the Africaans-Speaking Players, all of whom have unique opportunities (for what Universities possess their own theatre outside America?) in attempting and often achieving a high standard of Dramatic Art in so splendidly equipped a laboratory which affords stimulus and fosters artistic enterprise among all connected with it.

Indeed, in many ways Cape Town has every right to feel proud of its beautiful University buildings,—the gift of Cecil Rhodes,—and not least in recent years of the Little Theatre in historic Government Avenue.

M. SOUTHWELL-SANDER,

*late Lecturer in Speech-Training & Dramatic Art,
S.A. College of Music,
University of Cape Town.*

THE SYDNEY PLAYERS' CLUB.

Established in 1924, the Club is the oldest repertory organisation in this City, and over the twelve years of its existence, it has adhered to a regular programme of activities. The usual year's schedule comprises six public seasons at which full-length plays are presented, ten studio evenings and twelve playreadings. At the public seasons the standard of production can be claimed to be an unusually high one, thanks in no small measure to the inspired work of Mr. J. E. C. Appleton, who, as a producer and designer of costumes, settings and lighting effects, displays a touch of genius which critics have been ready to acknowledge.

The Studio Evenings and playreadings are purely Club functions and at each of the former three or four one-act plays are presented.

The full-length plays presented this year have been "Haunted Houses" and "The Maitlands" by Ronald Mackenzie. At the third public season, current at the present time, "Cock Robin" by Elmer Rice and Phillip Barry is being produced. The play for the fourth season will be "The Path of Glory" by L. du Guarde Peach.

Following the example of the British Drama League, the Club held last year a Drama School at a picturesque and lovely spot on the New South Wales coast. It was not possible to have stage presentation of plays, but certain plays were studied and read and a series of lectures was given on such subjects as stage presentation, stage lighting, voice production, management and control and other kindred subjects. The school was a great success, and it is hoped to make it an annual affair.

Like many similar organisations, the Club is always faced by financial problems, and we have been obliged to avoid lavish expenditure on productions. This has probably been a blessing in disguise, for our designers and mechanists have been able to secure most satisfactory and artistically striking effects by simple means. Another great problem is the lack of a proper Little Theatre. It is considered to be a lamentable thing that a city the size of Sydney should not have a properly designed and maintained Little Theatre, and for many years the Club has done all in its power to arouse the City authorities to a sense of duty in the matter, and one of our main objectives is the organisation of our own theatre. Happily, considerable progress has been made in this direction during the last two years.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

Perhaps I should indicate, in conclusion, that the Club is purely amateur in character and all its work is carried out by a band of enthusiasts whose only incentive is a love of the theatre. It might be mentioned in passing that the professional theatre in Australia is at a very low ebb. It is tragic to relate that in Sydney for example, there are only two theatres open; one is used continually for variety and the other almost continuously for musical comedy.

Yours very sincerely,

BETTY FRENCH,
Hon. Secretary.

STANSTED.

In the commodious Stansted Theatre adjacent to the Earl of Bessborough's country seat in Hampshire, The Society of Stansted Players gave six performances of "The Winter's Tale" during the first week of September. The play was produced by Mr. Martin Browne, and the well-trained cast gave a most lively performance of the comedy.

Outstanding among the performers were Mr. Ralph Anderson as Leontes, Mr. Andrew Duncan Jones as Florizel, and the Viscountess Buckmaster as Hermione. Mr. Martin Browne himself gave a spirited performance of Autolycus, and Miss Henzie Raeburn was a very sympathetic Paulina. Viscount Duncannon, with some ironic dignity, impersonated Father Time.

Scenery designed by Miss Olive Snell and excellent music supplied by the Stansted Players Orchestra did much to enhance the good effects obtained by the actors.

Lord Bessborough is doing a fine work in providing such occasions, not only for artistic expression among the players, but for giving an opportunity to the countryside to view at first hand some of the masterpieces of dramatic art.

THE BRADFORD CIVIC PLAYHOUSE. OPENING OF NEW THEATRE.

An anonymous well-wisher believes in the Bradford Civic Playhouse to the extent of £5,000. He has guaranteed that sum towards rebuilding the old theatre which was seriously damaged by fire last March. Plans have been prepared for a modern Little Theatre on the old site in Chapel Street with comfortable seats, good ventilation, the latest lighting and stage equipment, its own workshop, rehearsal rooms, dressing rooms, office, etc. In short, it is to be a theatre that you will want to visit with your friends.

A heavy obligation rests upon those who are thus seeking to establish the Civic Playhouse on a firm basis. They believe that the Playhouse will exercise an important influence on the intellectual and entertainment life of the City and they trust that all who are interested in the Playhouse will assist them through membership or otherwise in the discharge of their obligation.

Discriminating playgoers visit the "Civic" because they know that they will find there plays of distinction. Acted by many of the leading players in the city, produced and staged by experts, Playhouse productions have established a reputation worth maintaining. And we have done over 80 since 1929. Redecorated and refurnished, the Club will open its doors simultaneously with the theatre. Amongst its amenities will be a cafe for light meals and refreshments—a comfortable lounge—entertainments, lectures, recitals, playreadings, visits by well-known theatrical personalities, etc.

FILM SOCIETY.

Films of an unusual character rarely seen at the commercial cinemas will be screened at frequent intervals. Programmes will include outstanding foreign films, news-reels, documentary and educational pictures. A production branch for members may also be formed.

Any reader of "Drama" who would be interested in further particulars should write to the Hon. Secretary, Miss Winifred Priestley, Bradford Civic Playhouse, 18, Chapel Street, Bradford.

THE SHEFFIELD PLAYGOERS' SOCIETY.

Though not usually addicted to summer activities, this society was able to wind up its 1935-36 programme with a successful "Theatrical Garden Party," held on July 4th at "Lynwood," Sheffield. In addition to the frivolous attractions common to most garden parties, theatregoers and artists found a good deal to interest them in the Theatrecraft Exhibition, which was arranged for this function in the Playgoers' studios (these forming part of the premises in which the Garden Party was held). Costumes from the British Drama League wardrobe were on view, and a large collection of designs, photographs, and souvenirs had been assembled from various sources; a puppet-show made by youthful students of the Sheffield College of Arts and Crafts, and some exquisite stage models by Miss Una Paulet, attracted the attention they well deserved; but the exhibition perhaps owed most to the energy and enterprise of Mr. W. Kenneth Wood, who came from London with a fascinating collection of puppets of various types and nationalities, and some examples of the silhouette film work of Miss Lotte Reiniger. In another studio some prize-winning films of the Institute of Amateur Cinematographers were shown; while a tennis-court formed an open-air theatre in which a programme of dancing and cabaret entertainments was presented. The "profession" was represented by the director and artists of the Sheffield Repertory Theatre and variety artists from the Empire Theatre (the only other professional theatre at present open in Sheffield), who conducted propaganda on behalf of the National Theatre Appeal.

SHAKESPEARE'S "HENRY THE FOURTH" (PART ONE).

PLAYED BY THE PUPILS OF BLACKHEATH HIGH SCHOOL.

If all these young actresses had appeared in a better play than this historical jumble of Mr. Shakespeare's, they would certainly have done themselves more justice, but even as it was they showed many qualities which are usually lacking in school shows. They managed to make the dialogue reasonably interesting and kept quite a lot of brightness in the play from beginning to end. It was natural that the comedy scenes should have been played best—they are, after all, the worth while parts of the play—and in particular I would mention the excellent acting of Miss Mary Turner as Prince Hal, and Miss Joyce Tucker as Falstaff. These two actresses enlivened the play with considerable wit and understanding of human nature. Miss Wayne as the King, and Miss Surbey as Hotspur played efficiently but with too much respect for tradition. The production was excellently managed by Miss Hutchinson who

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

can be credited with those essentials to successful production, a sense of speed and freshness of attack. Briefly—one of the best school performances I have seen.

G. E. MIDDLEDITCH.

THE MOTHERS' UNION PAGEANT OF 1926.

Within a period of ten years the Mothers' Union has presented three notable Pageants in the Albert Hall, Kensington, of definite character and charm. For the Golden Jubilee of this Society "The Golden Ring" was written and produced by Mr. Harry Millar in the summer of 1926. A World-Wide Conference of Mothers' Union workers and representatives, held in 1930, was the occasion of a second Pageant "The Gift," also under the direction of Mr. Millar. On the 2nd, 3rd and 4th of July last, the Diamond Jubilee of the Mothers' Union was commemorated by a third Pageant, this time unentitled, wherein The Lord's Prayer was presented "as an act of Thanksgiving to Almighty God for all the blessings bestowed on the Mothers' Union during the last sixty years."

The Rev. Eric Cheetham is to be congratulated as the producer of a lovely and unique spectacle in which one saw the daily lives of simple people lifted into the joyful "fellowship of Christ's religion" and where music dancing, birth, marriage, death, prayer, sacrament and the Holy Incarnation were held to view as living strands in the stuff of life.

The scene was a terraced garden with the village church at the foot of hills and a stretch of sea in the background. A fanfare by trumpeters heralded the entry of a Chorus who, before the various scenes were enacted, spoke the verse written by the Rev. G. D. Rosenthal illustrating each clause of The Lord's Prayer. Over a thousand members and friends of the Mothers' Union took part, helped by a very few professionals and the music and movement provided by the Kneller Hall Band and the Maclarens School of Dancing.

After only one full rehearsal the six performances ran without a hitch and were greatly appreciated by the crowded audiences. As there are still many who are anxious to see this Pageant, it will be repeated in the Albert Hall on Wednesday and Thursday, November 4th and 5th, at 2.30 and 7.30 p.m. Tickets may be obtained from The Mary Sumner House, Westminster, S.W.1.

A SUCCESSFUL SUMMER THEATRE.

The cult of the summer theatre is growing in this country. Seaside repertory companies are increasingly popular, and several individual efforts in rural districts are now firmly established. One of the most successful is the Barn Theatre, at Shere, in Surrey.

For the past three summers, in a magnificent old barn, the Otherwise Club has produced a series of plays. The theatre is well equipped; the auditorium seats over 100 and the surroundings are of exceptional beauty. The Club—a proprietary club—is responsible for renting the theatre and directing the season. The performers, drawn from the legitimate stage, the dramatic academies and from experienced amateurs, sleep and work in close proximity to the theatre, and all scenic construction and dressmaking is carried out on the spot.

Each year the audiences increase. This summer over 1,500 people witnessed the five productions, comprising members of the Club and their guests, they came from far and near, on foot and by car. There is no subscription and no charge for seats. But at each performance, in the interval, everyone is asked to contribute, according to their valuation of the entertainment. By this honest means, gross receipts this year totalled over £160. This comparatively small sum has yielded a net profit sufficient to add an annexe to the stage and to purchase a private collection of Victorian costumes.

The production of new plays of merit has always been the policy of the Club. The season just ended included a new translation of the Alcestis by Professor Meredith of Belfast, a new verse play about Jonah by Neville Masterman, a de Musset comedy adapted by Vernon Gardner and, for the second year in succession, a translation by Monica Gardner, of a play by Fredro, the great Polish dramatist. Since the founding of the Club in 1930, by Margaret Masterman, over twenty plays have received their first performances at Shere.

For the 1937 season a new play by a well known detective novelist has already been secured, and the Club will be glad to consider any MSS. suitable for production in their theatre. All enquiries during the winter, from playwrights, producers, actors or technicians, should be addressed to Richard Ford, Esq., 32, Percy Street, W.1.

REFLECTIONS ON THE FESTIVAL.

We have received a letter from Mr. A. J. TALBOT from which we extract the following:

"As the author of "The Spartan Girl" which was awarded the Cup at the Old Vic. I was pained to gather from Mr. C. B. Purdon's reflections in the July number that my play was not worthy of the Festival, and that Mr. John Drinkwater, instead of saying nice things about it ought, according to Mr. Purdon, to have said 'Don't do The Spartan Girl again....'

I am genuinely distressed to think that, if Mr. Purdon is right, a play of mine should have let the Festival down rather badly by carrying the Sacred Lamp of Burlesque to the highest place....

I expect most amateur societies would like to know why Comedy—or for that matter, any other type of play—is to be taboo in the Festival, when, according to the Rules, they are invited to show their competence in any kind of play whatsoever.... To my mind there is no reason behind the prejudice against Comedy for Festival work.... I must say that the idea that the Comic Muse has no business at the Festival comes rather surprisingly from Mr. Purdon, because I remember that he himself won the Cup hands down with his exquisite production of Charles Lee's delightful bucolic comedy 'Mr. Sampson'."

We regret that we cannot allow a continuance of this correspondence, but it is only fair to Mr. Purdon to remind our readers that his protest was made not so much against the presentation of Comedy in the Festival as against plays which gave scope for a high standard of scenic effect rather than of individual acting.

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(See paragraph in this month's issue of "Drama.")

Further particulars will be announced in the November issue, or may be had on application
to the Schools Organizer, British Drama League.

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